

2019 State of the County

Good evening, Rockland.

Greetings to the members of the Legislature, elected officials, community and business leaders, county department heads, employees and citizens who have joined us tonight to hear about the state of our county.

And I welcome those of you watching this live coverage on News 12 or FiOS 1, or on Facebook live at home or on a mobile device. In the coming days, the video of this event will be posted on Rocklandgov.com as well.

As you may know, the County Charter requires me to update the Legislature once every year on the State of the County. Thank you to the Legislators who joined me here tonight to hear this message and know that the required written update is forthcoming.

I am honored to have you all join me this evening as I present that 2019 State of the County.

For the first time ever, we are holding this event outside of the chambers of the County Legislature. This is not in any way a slight against my partners in government. Rather it is an effort to make government more open and accessible to the people of Rockland.

It is also a pledge. Coming here to the Palisades Center was not done by accident. Critical to the success of this county is that we continue to focus on economic development and this shopping and entertainment center is one of the keys to that success.

I can with great pride report to all that the state of our beloved County is strong and becoming more robust! We have made great progress over the 5 years I have been in office but it has not been easy.

When I first ran for County Executive I promised that I would right the fiscal ship, grow our local economy and stop over-development. I made it my mission upon taking office to fulfill that pledge. Our thanks to the help of many of my Department Heads and talented people in this organization. We are well on our way.

During my first term, we managed to bring back \$5 billion in ratables and during 2019 that growth has continued. Another \$2.5 billion in the last year alone. A remarkable achievement that was brought about through the hard work of many people.

I want to mention Lucy Redzeposki my Director of Economic Growth and Tourism, Jeremy Schulman, Director of the Rockland Economic Development Corporation, Al Samuels, President of the RBA and Steve Porath, Rockland County Industrial Development Agency, just a few of many who have and continue to work very closely to bring new businesses into the county and help current businesses expand. **Acknowledge.**

The biomed sector in Rockland is booming. The New York Center for Innovation campus in Pearl River continues to grow. RK Pharma, an international pharmaceuticals manufacturer with facilities in India and New Jersey has signed a long-term lease on 83,000 SF.

They plan to create approximately 100 jobs at the site and aim to double their workforce over the next couple of years. Total private investment for this endeavor is projected to be \$17.5 million.

Our highly-educated workforce and excellent infrastructure are key advantages in attracting the type of R&D presence that RK Pharma brings. Their expansion into the county represents another important next step in fashioning Rockland into one of the foremost hubs for the life sciences.

Caribbean Food Delights in Tappan, the largest Jamaican patty manufacturer in the world, is building a \$23.5 million, 50,000 SF addition to their existing facility which will create 25 new jobs over the 150 already employed there.

The GARNER Historic District in West Haverstraw is combining arts, commerce, history and an award-winning brewery to bring new businesses to the area.

This May we will see how they all come together to increase tourism to the area with "The Craft Beer Immersive Arts Festival." It is planned for May 18-19. Mark your calendars. I hope to see you there.

Java Love Coffee is set to become Suffern's first independent coffee company. This women-owned business is expected to open by April 1st.

Blue Hill Plaza is still attracting new businesses. Epic Insurance moved from New Jersey with 130 employees. Brosnan Risk Consulting moved into 18,000 SF last year and went from 50 to 60 employees on site.

The NYC Football Club opened a state-of-the-art soccer training facility on Old Orangeburg Road which employs almost 90 people, including pro athletes from around the world.

In Sloatsburg, the newly opened Valley Rock Inn is fast becoming a globally known spa hotel destination.

This volume and variety of right sized development across Rockland is exactly what will place us on the map and bring great wealth to our County, wealth that will ensure stability in our tax base for years to come.

A cautionary note to our citizens however as this strategy works **only** if politicians do something often difficult for too many ... not to spend that added revenue. We here in County government **have not** and **will not** travel that path.

One of the factors driving development and expansion here is a Strategic Alliance Memorandum with the US Small Business Administration which was signed by Deputy County Executive Rosa last year to help increase investment in Rockland County.

It has paid dividends for our small businesses. Giving them the needed capital to open their doors for the first time or expand their offerings.

127 SBA loan guarantees in 2018, a 49% increase over 2017.

The dollar values of those loans are over \$44 million, also a 49% increase over the \$29 million we received in 2017.

We are creating an environment where businesses can thrive and jobs are created all while respecting the lives and communities of our residents.

All these new enterprises have the added benefit of encouraging more people to visit Rockland. In January, we were able to take another step towards continuing to improve and enrich life in our community by announcing over \$211,000 in tourism grants.

These funds went to organizations that bring arts, music, theater and culture into Rockland County. We want people to come here, spend the day in one of our downtowns, go to an arts festival and then go to a theater performance.

While they are here, they can eat at our restaurants, shop in our stores and find other ways to spend money. This is money that fuels the bright future of this county.

According to the most recent Tourism Economic Study from New York State, tourism accounted for 7.3 percent of all employment in Rockland and generated \$31.5 million in local taxes, an increase of 4 percent over the previous year.

These numbers show that tourism is big business here. Increases in tourism spending are helping fuel our economy and expand our tax base; every penny paid in taxes by these visitors is a penny that we, Rockland residents, do not have to spend.

The report also noted that International markets represented 30 percent of New York State's traveler spending base. This coincides with increased outreach efforts by our Economic Development and Tourism team. Outreach included places as close as Manhattan and Queens, and some as far away as Scotland, Ireland and China.

Chinese tourism alone has far surpassed our own predicted goals with over 5,000 hotel rooms booked last year. That's a 110% increase over 2017 and is coupled with revenue spending estimates between \$15 and \$60 million.

If not for tourism generated sales and local taxes the average household in Rockland would have to pay an additional \$585 in yearly taxes to maintain our current level of services.

Another focus as this year continues is protecting that tourism related revenue by ensuring the toll over the new bridge remains reasonable. It's important not just to tourism but to our commuters and businesses who cross that bridge every day.

For years, Tappan Zee toll dollars have made up one-third of the revenue for the New York State Thruway, which reaches to the Canadian border, far from Rockland County. Now we have every right to expect the financial support of the rest of the Thruway Authority to help pay for and maintain the new bridge that is in our backyard.

The cost of the new bridge should be spread across the whole thruway, as it is a key component of the entire road system. And let's be clear the new bridge is NOT a City connector bridge, it is a bridge that connects Rockland to Westchester County just like the Bear Mountain Bridge.

Where are our Federal officials who paid in full for the infamous "Bridge to Nowhere" in Alaska? Where is our fair share of \$11 billion dollars that New York State collected in bank settlement funds?

Any increase in the crossing fees will hurt our residents, businesses and future economic growth in the region. We will not stand for it.

I know our local representatives in the State feel as I do. I expect they will remind their colleagues that government policies often directly affect consumer habits and the market.

Putting obstacles like an expensive toll in the way of attracting people to Rockland County would have a wide-ranging negative economic impact. Our residents deserve to have a bridge toll we can all afford.

All of the factors I have mentioned so far tonight have helped drive down our unemployment rate to 3.2% at the end of 2018, that's tied for the 5th lowest among NY's 62 counties. And lower than the statewide and National rate of 3.9%.

One of the ways we can maintain this low unemployment rate and continue the high level of growth we experienced in 2018 is what brings me here to the Palisades Center. First let's have a round of applause for our hosts who do so much for the Rockland Community.

Last year the Palisades Center donated space to 75 not-for-profits and collaborated with them to hold over 560 events. Everything from tabling for fundraising and awareness campaigns to trainings in the community rooms and large events like this one.

They also paid \$21.4 million in property taxes in 2018 and generated \$23.5 million in sales tax revenue. There needs to be a recognition of fact. Venues like the Palisades Center are in a pitched battle to remain viable in this era of online shopping.

They also face challenges from locations across the border in New Jersey and our neighboring counties.

Right now, the Palisades Center is proposing a much-needed internal enhancement, the use of space that already exists and adding parking to remain competitive. In other words, this would be much like your neighbor finishing their attic or basement while adding a parking space in their driveway so that no one parks in front of your house.

The difference here is that these improvements would bring more money to our County and Clarkstown while stabilizing the tax base to the relief of local taxpayers. With recent studies showing 76% of customers visit from outside the county, why would we not try to make that work to our advantage? Allow visitors to our County pay for our services.

The benefits to building out the existing space on the 3rd and 4th floors are significant. 700 construction jobs, 500 new permanent retail, entertainment and food service jobs, more ways to attract visitors to Rockland and an estimated \$5 million in taxes generated for Clarkstown and the County.

I sincerely hope that Clarkstown and the Palisades Center can find common ground on this issue because the benefits of doing this right far outweigh any perceived notions.

This is an opportunity to increase revenue, add jobs and improve the mall experience at no added costs nor impact on our lives or environment. It is a classic "grab the brass ring" scenario.

In addition to allowing this common-sense use of pre-existing space. We must do everything in our power to support brick and mortar stores across the County.

I ask our State representatives to please enact the SCOTUS decision on internet sales. Help us level the playing field and bring much needed revenue to local governments.

Not long ago, we all witnessed the fiscal near-collapse of this government and it is a lesson I will not soon forget. I would not allow speculative revenue to be included in the 2019 Budget and I wholeheartedly thank the Minority Legislators who supported my budget veto.

They refused to follow the Majority back down the path of deficits and double-digit tax increases. These seven legislators are the key to our continuing success and I thank them again for standing up to help me protect Rockland's financial recovery. **Acknowledge.**

Our fiscal discipline is paying off. We're another year closer to paying off our deficit bond while staying under the State property tax cap. We've also seen seven consecutive bond rating increases.

And for the first time since 2006, the county has an unassigned positive fund balance in its general fund or in more common language, a surplus of almost \$6.3 million.

According to the NYS Comptroller Rockland is no longer the most fiscally stressed county in the state. This is a great accomplishment and acknowledgement of the strides we have made over the last 5 years.

And while we have made significant progress, we still have a long way to go until we reach full financial strength. The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) recommends that the General Fund maintain an unrestricted fund balance of no less than 2 months of operating expenditures to be truly financially healthy.

That's between \$50 and \$90 million in the bank, nowhere near the \$6.3 million we currently have. I will continue to adhere to the strict budgeting, careful cost-benefit analysis and responsible long-term planning that has been the cornerstones of my administration's policies.

I look forward to continuing to work together with my colleagues from the legislature as we look to grow our fund balance.

We are continuing to redevelop and repurpose the Robert Yeager Health Complex. This is a defining moment for Rockland as we set the stage for decades of continued success.

Building "A" is being repopulated with numerous departments.

We are proceeding with our vision of creating a health and human services hub for our residents. This blueprint will provide a "one-stop" location for essential county health and human services programs, easily accessible via public transportation.

Our goal is to transform this area into a modern and professional campus that improves the health outcomes and wellness of the people of Rockland County through the delivery of a continuum of critical services.

Thank you to Director of Purchasing Paul Brennan, Bob Gruffi the Director of Facilities for Rockland and Deputy County Executive Guillermo Rosa, who managed these moves and so much more. Their efforts saved us thousands and I want to acknowledge their outstanding contributions.

The renovation of Building "G" is underway and come August will be the new, updated home of the Police Academy. The current academy has outgrown their space and will be moved out of the basement of the Fire Training Center.

The redesign of the Medical Examiner's new Autopsy Suite and Offices is underway. And will soon reopen as the Center for Forensic Medicine an updated facility that will better service the needs of our residents.

All steps toward the modernization of your County government.

Our departments have done so much over the last year, finding new ways to save money and re-inventing themselves to better serve our residents.

Behind many of these improvements is our Personnel Department. They have partnered with Rockland Community College and New York State to participate in

programs that train our employees to find new and more efficient ways of doing business.

We are teaching our supervisors and lead employees the tools necessary to be effective and successful leaders; these programs are critical to Rockland's long-term success. **Acknowledge Commissioner Lori Gruebel and team.**

Our ITS Department has implemented new software and improved existing systems. Bringing County Government into this century by enhancing our ability to provide customer services to our residents and saving taxpayer money through efficiency. **Acknowledge Frank Calise and team.**

Our STOP DWI office used grant funding to set up successful DWI crackdown events throughout the year resulting in 811 total DWI arrests across the county.

Next year they will work to get more officers trained as Drug Recognition Experts, commonly known as DRE's. A critical task as we face the possibility of legalized recreational marijuana.

I urge our State representatives to talk to local law enforcement about the challenges they face and find funding for these necessary, added costs local municipalities must now bear due to their legislation. **Acknowledge Leslie Berger and Law Enforcement.**

Our Human Rights Commission had a busy year. Hosting a Women's Forum, Interfaith and Fair Housing Symposiums and moving into their new space in Building A. Thank you to Commissioner of Human Rights Constance Frazier. Your job is more important now than ever before.

I pledge now to continue working closely with you to eradicate intolerance and hate while increasing the understanding that we all seek the same goals of a bright future for ourselves, our families and our neighbors. **Acknowledge.**

You may have heard we brought on a New Director of Consumer Protection, a warm welcome to Jim Elcik who has big plans for Consumer Protection in 2019.

Increasing public awareness of Consumer Protection through better utilization of social media and outreach to residents and businesses. Continued enforcement of existing laws to protect consumers and homeowners.

Jim is an experienced manager with extensive law enforcement experience from his time in the United States Marshals Service. I look forward to working with him to protect our residents from crooks and scams.

Our Probation Department has been busy working with the Center for Safety and Change and Legal Services of the Hudson Valley to expand hours available for victims of domestic violence to seek orders of protection. This resulted in almost 600 orders of protection being filed.

They also collected and distributed \$350,000 in restitution to 100 victims of crime. All in support of their mission to protect the public while holding offenders accountable and focusing on their continued rehabilitation.

We are working diligently to implement the new "Raise the Age" law here on the local level. If you're not familiar this law means that 16 and 17 year olds are no longer automatically charged as adults.

In a joint effort of our Public Defender's Office, Probation Dept, District Attorney, Office of Court Administration, the Department of Corrections, Sheriff's Office, local Magistrates and Police Departments we formed a new Youth Court overseen by the Honorable Sherri Eisenpress, Family Court Judge.

We received a grant allowing us to train attorneys and staff to appear at night and weekend arraignments to represent youth clients.

The tremendous amount of coordination required to accomplish all this cannot be understated.

Keeping juveniles out of adult prisons makes them significantly less likely to reoffend and be re-arrested, it also saves hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars.

Our Youth Bureau is finding other ways to reach the young people in Rockland through the Youth Employment Program and the Rockland Conservation and Service Corps.

These programs help young people develop positive attitudes and employable skills to help them become contributing members of Rockland's workforce.

Our Service Corps completed 75 environmental projects; improving over 93 miles of regional trails and water bodies and aiding in flooding mitigation efforts.

They also launched our first Repair Cafes. A transformational initiative that pairs Repair Coaches who are neighbors with fix-it expertise, with people who bring in items in need of some TLC.

Our first two events in Nyack and Haverstraw resulted in more than 300 repairs. Successfully keeping these items out of the landfill and creating a true sense of community.

We plan to hold two more Repair Cafe events this year. Dates and locations are to be determined so stay tuned.

As focused as we are on the well-being of our youth we are also doing all we can for Rockland's seniors. Our Office for the Aging is continuing to find new ways to reach this population; distributing over 200,000 copies of their Moving Forward newsletter throughout the year.

Director Tina Cardoza-Izquierdo has turned what used to be a costly expense into a revenue neutral endeavor. Thank you, Tina, for showing how government can accomplish so much while safeguarding taxpayer's money. **Acknowledge.**

Our County Clerk, Paul Piperato is also exploring new ways to make life easier for Rocklanders. Residents can now take over a dozen certification tests, from Real Estate to Hair Styling, at the Fire Training Center. No longer needing to travel to Newburgh or New York City.

Our Law Department, led by County Attorney Tom Humbach won another victory in the case against Sympaticare who failed to meet their end of the bargain when attempting to purchase the Summit Park Hospital.

Rockland County Supreme Court Judge Marx issued an order permitting the County to keep the down payment and other money paid into escrow by the failed purchaser of Summit Park. The judgment will be worth approximately \$3.5 million.

While Sympaticare is appealing this ruling, I am confident that our County Attorney and Principal Assistant County Attorney Lorraine Feiden will prevail in this case. Ms. Feiden's efforts have also saved the County the expense of several hundred thousand dollars of outside counsel fees. Well done.

Acknowledge.

The Law Department has also been critical in supporting our Shared Services Initiative.

Last year we submitted our shared services plan to the New York State Division of the Budget that included 34 different projects that covered a wide variety of services. The plan has an estimated savings of \$4.7 million in 2019 and \$9.9 million in 2020.

Savings from 2019 may be eligible for New York State matching funds. The sheer number of County Departments, Towns, Villages, School Districts, Sewer and

Fire Districts that took part in this year-long process is impressive. I thank them for their involvement which was critical to the successful creation of this plan.

I also want to thank our consultants from Pattern for Progress, specifically Andy Stewart, who helped draft the plan and Stephen Powers, my Director of Public Policy who oversaw the whole process. Along with the Town Supervisors and Village Mayors who took part. **Acknowledge.**

In this era of increased cooperation between municipalities it is incomprehensible that the Governor has proposed eliminating Aid and Incentives for Municipalities or AIM funding to towns and villages.

Yet another example of New York State attempting to save money by dumping costs onto villages, towns and counties. With the advent of the property tax cap this process is even more unacceptable than it was in the past.

When the State comes up with new ideas such as the recent passage of early voting, funding MUST accompany these initiatives. It is time for New York to seriously pursue mandate relief. We cannot afford not to.

In a much better example of working together our Office of Fire and Emergency Services partnered with our Towns and Villages to complete the Multi-Jurisdictional Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan.

They also offered over 3,600 training opportunities to our volunteer firefighters, emergency medical service personnel, as well as member of the general public.

The current firefighter burn building is over 45 years old and needs to be replaced. We plan to install new burn containers to permit us to continue to train our firefighters during the time span when the existing building is leveled and a new structure is erected on the current site.

And as of Monday, we also have a new Director of Fire and Emergency Services. Please welcome Chris Kear. He has big plans for the Fire Training Center and the Fire Services in Rockland County.

He will update to the County's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, increase the recruitment and retention of volunteers and reduce false alarms throughout Rockland.

While Chris has large shoes to fill I am confident he is up the challenge and will lead us well into the future.

Our Veterans Service Agency is also exploring new ways to reach Vets in the county holding monthly veteran's socials and sharing upcoming events through the veteran calendar on their website.

But one of their greatest successes of the last year was the opening and dedication of the Gulf War/War on Terror Monument at Haverstraw Bay Park. The first such monument in New York State and as a military Dad of sons who served in that conflict it holds added significance for me.

The Monument is in honor of all those who served in the Gulf War and the War on Terror, and for those Rockland County residents that made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

I know many of you here tonight were in attendance for the dedication but if you have not yet visited I urge you to do so.

The true purpose of this monument is not just to pay tribute to those who served and gave their lives. It is for their families; for their friends; for those who watched over them; for everyone touched by the Gulf War and the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Our hope is that it will help bring closure to those of us who have lost friends and family. It was built to bring a sense of peace to those who served and may still be battling the demons they first encountered overseas.

Our Department of Mental Health is forging alliances across Rockland to combat the scourge of opioid addiction. Partnering with Montefiore Nyack Hospital, Good Samaritan Hospital and many others in an attempt to lower the rate of opioids being prescribed.

These organizations all sent letters asking prescribers to do three things: educate themselves on the safe and effective treatment of pain, screen patients for opioid use disorder and connect them to treatment, and approach addiction as a chronic illness rather than a moral failing.

Rockland is moving forward with litigation against the pharmaceutical companies that made and sold prescription opioids that contributed to this epidemic of death. We expect these companies to pay for the damage, death and destruction their outrageous marketing strategies have brought to our communities.

Our Warming Center has had many successes over the last year. Besides keeping those in need warm and safe during bone chilling conditions. In 2018,

our Department of Social Services was able to transition 37 individuals to permanent housing.

The warming center is in a repurposed space at the County health complex. It has showers and laundry facilities. Dinner and breakfast are provided to overnight guests. Along with training, resume building and access to public health services.

During this latest "Polar Vortex" they were faced with being filled to capacity but refused to turn anyone away and worked to place people in other temporary or permanent housing situations.

The money used to help connect those in need with housing has come from \$300,000 in HUD grants.

Guests also spend time with staff from DSS and the Department of Mental Health who connect them with needed services. Remember that no matter your station in life, no one is immune to crisis. Everyone needs a helping hand from time to time and this is a leg up, not a hand out.

My thanks to Social Services Commissioner Joan Silvestri, Mental Health Commissioner Michael Leitzes and their teams for all of their efforts.

Last year we saw two of our employees and two local business owners go above and beyond in extending that helping hand to someone in need.

Breda Lyons and Catherine Levins, the owners of the River Court restaurant in New City, spent over a year looking after a person who was homeless, hungry and physically challenged.

They eventually contacted Maura Donoghue and Melissa Pepper from DSS who worked very hard to get this woman placed. She is now housed and productive right here in Rockland.

I was joined in December by Legislators Lon Hofstein and Christopher Carey in acknowledging all these special people at the River Court restaurant with awards for their above and beyond efforts for one in need. Let's please give them a hand.

A \$400,000 grant was also received by the Rockland County Soil & Water Conservation District in partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension. The funds will be used to map and verify stormwater outfalls to enhance water quality monitoring.

Our Division of Environmental Resources also recruited over 350 volunteers last year to take part in community science projects.

Their efforts are just one of the ways we are working to maintain and protect Rockland's natural beauty. Thank you to the head of Environmental Resources Allan Beers and his Department. **Acknowledge.**

Our Planning Department completed 689 development reviews for municipalities within Rockland County, which was the highest ever in their history. This is one of the ways we are keeping a close eye on development around Rockland.

My Executive Order prohibits County departments from issuing permits for developments that have not complied with General Municipal Law or GML for short.

GML requires towns and villages to comply with the findings of the County Planning Commissioner or file a reason why a decision has been made not to comply.

Failure to do so will result in the County not issuing well permits, rooming house permits, drainage permits, road opening permits, issuance of new addresses and most importantly water and sewer connections.

You can go ahead and build whatever you want but good luck without running water and with having to use an outhouse. Thank you to Acting Commissioner Dough Scheutz and his entire team at Planning and Transportation.

The Public Transportation Department has been an important advocate for our commuters this year, regularly pushing NJ Transit and Metro-North to live up to their commitments to our residents. And while things have been difficult we are making progress, as NJ Transit held a listening session in Suffern last night to hear directly from me and our riders.

We will not ever stop fighting to get the improved service our commuters deserve and that we pay for.

They also worked through the procurement process to award a new 5-year contract for operation and maintenance of the TOR bus system to Transdev and with the help of Purchasing Director Paul Brennan negotiated a contract savings of more than \$2.5 million before the final contract was signed off on.

There are more improvements coming to the TOR service this year. Last year saw 13 new buses join our fleet all thanks to Federal and State funding and NO COUNTY TAX DOLLARS. Thank you to Acting Commissioner Dough Scheutz and his entire team at Planning and Transportation.

Under the able stewardship of Highway Superintendent Skip Vezzetti, 2018 was a very active and successful year for the Rockland County Highway Department.

We continued our aggressive pavement preservation program with crack sealing early in the season followed by recycling and resurfacing approximately 20 miles of roadway. This allows the Highway paving program to maintain its ten-year life cycle.

They completed and opened the Orangeburg Road Bridge in the spring of 2018 and began construction on the Samsondale Avenue Bridge and had it open for traffic by December of last year.

The completion of both of these bridges places the Rockland County Highway Department with the best rated bridges of all the Counties in New York State.

The planning for the new Highway Department facilities continues and we anticipate going to bid on the project later this year. These facilities are badly needed. Just having proper storage and cleaning facilities for all of our equipment is expected to increase the life expectancy of our vehicles by 20%, (5 years) which translates to a savings of about \$190,000 a year.

I thank those members of the Legislature who helped pass the bond resolution for the \$29.5 million needed for construction. We can accomplish so much when we work together and I hope to see many more occasions like this as 2019 continues.

Of all our Departments this year, without a doubt the busiest has been our Department of Health. That is why I have asked many of our DOH employees to join us this evening. I want to thank and commend you for going above and beyond in service to the people of this county.

As we move through our 19th week of this measles outbreak the number of investigations performed, clinics held, vaccines given and hours worked are significant. And your hard work has not gone unnoticed.

Some numbers:

Not 1, but 7 un-vaccinated travelers diagnosed with measles entered our county between October 1st and 17th.

We now have 130 confirmed cases in Rockland with a total of 216 in NY. The most since 1989.

14,870 MMR vaccines have been administered since October.

6,000 students have been ordered to be kept home from 60 schools.

29 schools have now achieved a vaccination rate of 95% or more and have been removed from these orders.

Our outbreak has now lasted 130 days. This is the longest outbreak due to measles in the US since measles was eradicated in 2000. This is a preventable disease and we must ensure that this type of outbreak never, ever happens again.

We have seen up close the risks and dangers of being unvaccinated.

The time is long past to ensure that, absent a critical medical exemption approved by a doctor, every child entering school must be immunized against preventable diseases.

Legislation to do exactly that was recently introduced in Albany, it would eliminate all non-medical exemptions to vaccination requirements. I call upon our State Legislators to carry this issue forward and on the Governor to sign this into law.

I want to specially recognize Commissioner of Health Dr. Patricia Schnabel Ruppert, Director of the Center for Community Health Dr. Maria Cecilia Mosquera and Maria Souto from Communicable Disease who have all played a critical role in managing this outbreak.

(Present with Certificates)

Each of our Department of Health employees invited to be here tonight ought to be acknowledged for their dedication, hard work, and commitment to preserving public health in Rockland County.

You are the reason we have been able to contain this outbreak as well as we have. The fact that we had 7 primary carriers of this disease during October and only have the number of cases we have now is remarkable and a testament to all of you.

Amazingly, and despite all of these overwhelming challenges, Rockland County is rated as the healthiest county in the entire State of New York! Something we can all be proud of.

On behalf of the people of Rockland I thank you for doing your best to protect us.

And as if the outbreak alone wasn't enough to handle. Health Department inspectors for the Rockland Codes Initiative, soon to be the Center for Rockland Codes Investigations, performed thousands of inspections and cited sanitary code violations that resulted in \$64,000 more in fines than in 2017.

They also registered over 260 properties as part of the Rental Registry, collecting \$164,000 in fees.

But the fees and fines are not the goal of these programs. They are merely a tool to ensure compliance with the health and sanitary codes of this county. And most importantly ensure the health and safety of the people within it.

The safety of all residents is the highest priority of my administration. I want to commend the good landlords of Rockland for stepping up and helping to improve our housing stock.

We will not tolerate illegal development or allow anyone to risk the lives of our heroic volunteer firefighters.

Our Healthy Neighborhoods Program has had great success as well; visiting 384 homes last year and installing 820 Smoke Alarms and 588 Carbon Monoxide Alarms.

Little by little, step by step, we are making progress to ensure the health and safety of our residents and proving yet again why we were ranked as the #1 healthiest County in New York State last year.

I am so proud of the progress we are making not just here in government but all across Rockland.

I've spoken a lot this evening about the steps we are taking to improve the lives of all our residents and we must do more. We must not falter in this task.

I will do everything in my power to help lead us further down the path to success. I refuse to sit back and allow others to jeopardize what we have all worked so hard to accomplish.

But I cannot do it alone.

You are the key to our continued success. The people of Rockland. Those who were born here and those who have only just arrived.

Though we may come from different backgrounds it is only by working together that we can truly prosper as one people.

We all seek the same goals. Health, safety and prosperity for our families. Now we must improve upon the strong foundation we have built to give future generations their chance to enjoy all that Rockland has to offer.

I know that I can count on our dedicated employees and Department Heads to rise to the occasion. Because they have shown that they will already.

They work long hours to keep our roads safe and clear.

They go above and beyond to care for those in need.

They protect us from those who seek to do us harm.

They are there when we need them most.

But I need your help, we need your help. Our collective future is in all your hands.

It is time to get involved. Meet your neighbors, attend a school board meeting, volunteer at a not-for-profit, run for office. Raise your voice when you see something wrong in government and actively applaud and support efforts and officials that do the right thing.

Because when we come together and work together there is nothing we cannot accomplish. Let us prove to everyone what I already know, that Rockland is the greatest county in the State of New York.

I ask that we conclude tonight with a prayer for those serving our country in the armed forces of the United States of America. It is they and their comrades before them who secured and now protect the right for us to be a part of this wonderful democracy.

May God bless you, God bless Rockland and may God bless America. Thank you!